<u>CLAIMS</u>

We claim:

1.   A method comprising the steps of

    (a)   storing in at least one data store in operative connection with at least one

        computer, data representative of at least one patient and at least one

        medical item prescribed for use by the patient;

    (b)   storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of holding

        locations for medical items in a medical item dispenser, a plurality of types

        of medical items, and for each of the storage locations, a type medical item

        stored in the respective storage location;

    (c)   inputting through an input device in operative connection with the

        computer and the dispenser, data corresponding to the patient;

    (d)   dispensing from the dispenser responsive to the data stored in the data

        store, the type medical item prescribed for use by the patient, wherein the

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type medical item is dispensed from a storage location holding the type

medical item in the dispenser;

(e)   including in the data store responsive to execution of step (d), data

representative that the type medical item has been dispensed for use by the

5   patient, and that the type medical item has been dispensed from the

dispenser.

2.   The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

storing in the data store, data representative of a benefit plan associated with the

patient, and payment rules concerning payment for medical items associated with

10   the benefit plan;

and further comprising the step of charging for the dispensed medical item in

accordance with the payment rules.

3.   The method according to claim 2 and further comprising the step of:

reading a credit or debit card with a card reading device adjacent the dispenser,

15   wherein the card reading device is in operative connection with the computer, and

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wherein the charging step includes charging an account associated with the credit

or debit card.

4.   The method according to claim 2 wherein data representative of a benefits

provider is stored in correlated relation with data representative of a benefit plan, and wherein the

5   charging step includes charging the benefits provider.

5.   The method according to claim 3 wherein data representative of a benefits

provider is stored in correlated relation with the data representative of the benefit plan, and

wherein the rules concerning payment associated with the patient include a co-pay requirement

associated with the use of the medical item, and further comprising the step of calculating a co-

10   payment amount associated with the medical item, and wherein in the charging step the account

is charged the co-pay amount.

6.   The method according to claim 5 and further comprising the step of calculating a

benefit amount associated with the medical item, and wherein the charging step comprises

charging the benefits provider the benefit amount.

15   7.   The method according to claim 5 and prior to the charging step, further

comprising the step of outputting through an output device adjacent to the dispenser, indicia

representative of the co-pay amount.

8.   The method according to claim 7 and prior to the charging step, further comprising the step of receiving through an input device adjacent the dispenser, an input indicative of acceptance of the co-pay amount.

9.   The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

5   storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of benefit plans, and for each benefit plan, corresponding payment rules concerning payment for medical items;

storing in the data store, data representative of a benefit plan associated with the patient;

10   responsive to input of data corresponding to the patient in step (c), determining responsive to operation of the computer a benefit plan associated with the patient; and

charging for the medical item in accordance with the payment rules associated with the benefit plan determined to be associated with the patient.

10.   The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step

of displaying on an output device adjacent to the dispenser, display indicia including indicia

indicative of the type medical item.

11.   The method according to claim 10 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step

5   of receiving an input through an input device indicating agreement with the display indicia.

12.   The method according to claim 11 and prior to step (a), inputting through a

physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative of

information that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient, and a medical condition for

which the medical item has been prescribed, wherein in step (a) the data stored includes

10   prescription data, and wherein in the displaying step the display indicia includes indicia

indicative of the medical condition.

13.   The method according to claim 11 and prior to step (a) inputting through a

physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative of

information that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient and a physician name

15   corresponding to a physician prescribing the medical item for the patient, and wherein in step (a)

the data stored includes prescription data, and wherein in the displaying step the display indicia

includes indicia indicative of the physician name.

14.   The method according to claim 13 and further comprising the step of applying in

connection with the dispensed type medical item, indicia indicative of the physician name.

15.   The method according to claim 14 wherein the prescription data includes data

indicative of an instruction for using the type medical item, and wherein in the applying step,

5   indicia indicative of the instruction for using the type medical item is applied in connection with

the type medical item dispensed in step (d).

16.   The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (a), inputting through a

physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative

that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient, wherein in step (a) the data stored

10   includes prescription data.

17.   The method according to claim 16 and further comprising the step of applying to

the type medical item, indicia indicative of data included in the prescription data.

18.   The method according to claim 17 wherein the prescription data includes an

instruction for using the type medical item, and wherein in the applying step the indicia applied

15   to the medical item includes indicia indicative of the instruction.

19.   The method according to claim 17 and further comprising prior to the applying

step, printing a prescription label, wherein the prescription label includes the indicia indicative of

the data included in the prescription data, wherein in the applying step the label is applied in connection with the type medical item.

20.   The method according to claim 17 wherein the applying step is executed prior to step (d), wherein the indicia indicative of data included in prescription data is applied to the type

5   medical item to be dispensed in step (d).

21.   The method according to claim 19 wherein the applying step is executed subsequent to step (d).

22.   The method according to claim 21 and further comprising sensing the taking of the label after execution of step (d) wherein the medical item is dispensed, and preventing further

10   dispensing by the dispenser until the label is sensed as taken.

23.   The method according to claim 1 wherein step (a) includes storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of patients, and for each of the patients at least one type medical item prescribed for use by the patient, repeatedly executing steps (a) through (e) wherein data corresponding to different ones of the plurality of patients is input in subsequent executions

15   of step (c), and wherein in each step (d) the type medical item dispensed corresponds to the medical item prescribed for the one patient corresponding to the data input in the step (c) immediately executed prior to the execution of each step (d).

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24.   The method according to claim 23 and further comprising after executing a

particular step (c), failing to execute (d) and further comprising the step of contacting the patient

corresponding to the data input in the particular step (c).

25.   The method according to claim 23 wherein the data in the data store includes data

representative of a physician corresponding to at least one particular medical item prescribed for

at least one patient, and wherein in a particular step (c) the data corresponding to the particular

patient is input, and thereafter step (d) is not executed, whereby the particular medical item is not

dispensed, and further comprising the step of contacting the physician responsive to failing to

carry out step (d).

26.   The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step

of checking data in the data store representative of a medical history of the patient corresponding

to the data representative of the patient input in either of step (a) or step (c), and determining

responsive to the medical history data if the medical item should be withheld from the patient,

wherein step (d) is either executed or not executed responsive to the determination made based

on the medical history data.

27.   The method according to claim 26 wherein the checking step includes

communicating over a public data network.